

Legal Environment

Latvia's constitution protects freedoms of speech and the press, although there are a number of legislative restrictions. Incitement to racial and ethnic hatred is prohibited, as is anti-Semitic speech. Libel remains a criminal offense. While journalists rarely face criminal prosecution for the offense, in 2009 European Parliament member Aleksandrs Mirskis accused journalist Gunta Sloga of libel for publishing a report that questioned Mirskis's military experience. After a lengthy legal process, Sloga was acquitted in 2011 by the Jūrmala City Court, but Mirskis appealed the judgment. In 2013, the Supreme Court confirmed Sloga's acquittal.

Journalists have also faced pressure from authorities to reveal sources in cases of potential libel or for publishing state information. In 2013, Edgars Kupčs, the deputy editor of the regional newspaper *Zemgales Ziņas*, was accused of libel for writing an article that referenced the transcript of a public court hearing, and was pressured to reveal his source. During interrogations by the police, Kupčs reported that he was harassed and threatened with house arrest. The court ultimately dismissed the case and did not compel Kupčs to reveal his source. Also in 2013, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) issued a ruling in the case of *Nagla v. Latvia*, which concerned a police search of a journalist's home in 2010. The ECHR rejected a domestic court ruling and declared that the investigative authorities had failed to properly protect journalistic sources during their search.

The case of Leonids Jakobsons, an investigative journalist who had revealed information about misconduct in the Riga mayor's office, was ongoing in 2014; Jakobsons faces the charge of violating the Riga mayor's privacy by publishing his electronic communications. A case against netizen Ilmars Poikans, who was arrested in 2010 after revealing controversial tax records of public servants, also continued. In 2014, media watchdogs decried Latvian authorities' decision to hold the men's trials in closed court, calling for transparent proceedings and access for journalists.

The Law on Electronic Mass Media includes provisions for the regulation of media content. In April 2014, National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEPLP) used the law as grounds for suspending retransmissions of the Russian-language Rossiya RTR—which operates under the name RTR Planeta in Latvia—for three months. The channel, which is produced by a Russian state-owned media company, faced accusations of disseminating “war propaganda” and information that threatened Latvian national security. Authorities also reproached other Russian-language outlets about their content throughout the year.

The Law on Freedom of Information provides detailed rules on access to public information, and government agencies have adopted a number of practices in recent years to improve transparency, including publishing legislation and other official documents online.

The NEPLP serves as the main regulator for broadcast media. Beginning in 2012, members of the NEPLP were to be appointed by Parliament in consultation with various nongovernmental organizations, a move intended to improve the council's independence. Many current NEPLP members, however, still have links to the government.

Political Environment

Political parties and other actors have been known to exert influence over the media. In 2012, an NEPLP

member threatened to restrict guests on Latvijas Radio after several former political advisers criticized the ruling party on a talk program.

Latvian media are relatively diverse and competitive, offering a wide range of political viewpoints. The Law on Electronic Mass Media requires at least 65 percent of broadcast programming to be in Latvian, which is the country's only official language despite the presence of a large Russian-speaking minority. Programming for Russian speakers is available on cable television networks, in addition to the terrestrial broadcast stations.

Journalists and media outlets have occasionally been harassed or attacked in previous years, but there were no reports of such incidents in 2014. The 2010 murder of investigative journalist Grigorijs Nemcovs, widely believed to have been a contract killing, remained unsolved at year's end.

Economic Environment

The print media, which include a large number of both Latvian- and Russian-language newspapers, are independent and privately owned. The main national television stations include two public channels—LTV 1 and LTV 7—and the commercial channels TV3 and LNT. PBK, a third major commercial channel, broadcasts programs in Russian. A number of privately owned radio and television outlets operate on a regional basis. Many people in eastern Latvia cannot access Latvian television channels, partially as a result of the switchover from analog to digital transmission in 2009 and the weakness of cable infrastructure in rural areas. Viewers there primarily receive terrestrial and satellite broadcasts from Russia and Belarus. In 2014, approximately 76 percent of the population had access to the internet.

Ownership in Latvia's small media market has become increasingly concentrated in recent years, prompting concerns about pluralism. Foreign companies, including Scandinavian firms, own or control a considerable portion of Latvia's print and broadcast media. In March 2014, the Finnish company Sanoma sold the popular Latvian news portal Apollo.lv to the Estonian company Eesti Meedia, which already owns the widely visited Tvnet.lv outlet. Following a series of ownership changes, in 2012 the country's three major Russian-language newspapers were merged into a single publication. In June of that year, TV3, which is controlled by Sweden's Modern Times Group (MTG), took over LNT, which had seen a decline in market share in recent years. The media sector has suffered from the effects of the economic downturn that started in 2008, but has shown signs of recovery.

A 2011 amendment to the Law on the Press and Other Mass Media requires full disclosure of the beneficiaries of media enterprises, including websites. Outlets must list their beneficiaries in the Register of Enterprises. Nevertheless, the ownership structures of private media outlets are often opaque, and the government has received criticism for not facilitating or enforcing transparency.

Although television advertising comprises nearly half of the advertising market, online outlets are playing an increasingly stronger role. Due to advertising losses, MTG announced in 2013 that LNT and TV3 would only be available to cable television subscribers beginning in January 2014, affecting viewers who primarily rely on free broadcasts. In recent years, media outlets have received criticism for the practice of "hidden advertising," by which they disguise paid material as independent content. This practice frequently involves advertisements paid for by political or commercial interests.